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## RECENT HELLENISTIC LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

PHILO is largely responsible for the confusion of thought that has, since the beginning of the Civil Era, held sway over the minds of theologians. It was he who first attempted to identify the God of Israel with the Hellenistic First Principle. It is true, of course, that the two conceptions are alike, in that each was regarded respectively by the Jews and the Greeks as the power which explained the world. Yet beyond that the two ideas had little in common. Never could any philosopher have said of the first cause what Isaiah said of God, 'His Glory is the fullness of the earth.'<sup>1a</sup> Nor could one logically impute to the abstraction any of the thirteen attributes of the Deity which were revealed to Moses in Horeb.<sup>2</sup> In order to identify the God of the Hebrews with the philosophic conception, Philo introduces us to various intermediaries who are intended to unite God to, but who really separate Him from the world. No Jewish thinker uninfluenced by a foreign culture could have entertained such views as Philo gives expression to in the following paragraph, in which he deals with the law relating to the return of a pledge of a garment. 'Is it not natural, if not to reproach, at least to suggest to those who fancy that the lawgiver displays such earnestness about a garment, "What are you saying, my good man? Does the Creator and the Ruler of the Universe call himself merciful with respect to

<sup>1</sup> *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus.* By THOMAS H. BILLINGS, Chicago : THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 1919. pp. viii + 105.

*Philo's Contribution to Religion.* By H. A. A. KENNEDY, D.D., D.Sc. London : HODDER & STOUGHTON, 1919. pp. x + 245.

*Hellenism.* By NORMAN BENTWICH. Philadelphia : THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA, 1919. pp. 386.

<sup>1a</sup> Isa. 6. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. 34. 7.

such a trifle as the failure of a lender to restore a garment to a borrower?"<sup>3</sup> Such words spoken of the first cause are comprehensible. But applied to the God of Israel they are unintelligible. It is precisely with regard to such trifles that He shows pity and love for men.

Professor Billings (p. 14) seeks to acquit Philo of these charges by showing that these contradictions are inherent in every religious system. 'For every religious man', he says, 'the ultimate reality must be more than a mere, dead logical principle. Plato tends, under the influence of religious emotions, to make the Ideas into active powers.' 'The second inconsistency, that between the transcendence and the immanence of God, to use a modern expression, is an inconsistency which no system can escape which holds to the doctrine of an unchanging reality behind the world of sense. Exactly the same difficulty presents itself in connection with Plato's theory of ideas. The ideas are at once transcendent and immanent.'

Perhaps even more important for a proper appreciation of Philo is Professor Billings's endeavour to show that while very often Philo adopts the vocabulary of different schools, his conceptions are essentially Platonic. Thus *Logos* is a Stoic term, derived, as the author shows, from Aristotle (p. 31). But the Stoics, who were monists, conceived the *Logos* as material. They also looked upon it as the Supreme Being. In these aspects, the author maintains, their conception differed from Plato's Idea of the Good and from Philo's *Logos*. It appears, therefore, that in Philo's *Logos* we have an amalgam of a Stoic term and a purely Platonic conception.

The book is well supplied with copious notes. The first chapter gives an interesting sketch of the history of the interpretation of Philo. The concluding chapter shows how Philo was influenced by Plato's very style. The treatise, by tracing the various strands that appear in Philonic philosophy to these sources, helps to clarify many an obscure passage in the works of the great Jewish Philosopher.

<sup>3</sup> De Somn. I. 16.

Professor Billings's work is not only scholarly in content, but it also has the outward form of a work meant for serious students. Long Greek passages are untranslated; little attention is given to form or style. This can hardly be said of Professor Kennedy's *Philo's Contribution to Religion*. It is clear that the author intended it to be a popular book. The quotations from the New Testament are well chosen and are freely translated. The type is larger than is usual in a scientific work, and the whole appearance is that of a 'best seller'. Its literary character will, however, hardly detract from the importance of the work for all students of Philo.

The author takes several pages of his Introduction to explain the purpose of the book and to clarify the arrangement of the chapters. This necessity would tend to indicate that the work is fragmentary, and not completely developed. By constant comparisons between the words of Philo and those of the New Testament, the author seeks to throw light on both. The real tendency of his studies is to show the extent to which the doctrines that were prevalent at the beginning of the Christian Era were similar. Though Philo and Paul had no personal connexion, yet living at the same time, both coming under the influence of the Hebraic and Hellenistic cultures, they naturally had much in common.

Professor Kennedy shows how much these two religious thinkers were alike in their conceptions of Faith, of the possibility of a mystic union with the Divine, in their sense of human frailty and wickedness, and in their negation of fleshly lusts. But he might have gone even further. Many of these doctrines are found in Rabbinic literature itself. Alexander is represented in a famous passage as having asked the Jewish Sages,<sup>4</sup> 'What shall a man do that he may live?' 'Let him cause himself to die', they answered, in words which might have come from Philo or from the Apostle. Dr. Schechter in his *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*,<sup>5</sup> gives several examples of the manner in which the Rabbis looked to God for salvation from sin. A prayer like

<sup>4</sup> Tamid 32a.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter XVI.

'May it be Thy will that we shall not sin'<sup>6</sup> could only come from one who believed with Philo that no 'soul ever succeeded in putting out of sight and annihilating evil save that to which God was revealed, which he deemed worthy of his ineffable mysteries'.<sup>7</sup>

In this field there is still a great opportunity for research. To what extent are these new ideas due to Hellenism, and how far are they merely coincident with it? The belief in immortality, the doctrine that the flesh is bad, may be based on Plato's antithesis between matter and spirit, but there were probably other contributing causes. The book should serve as a stimulus to search these out and to discover why in some cases Judaism discarded its own conceptions once they were accepted by its rival and why in other cases it continued to cling to them.

The author does well to call attention to the apparent inconsistency between Philo's reverence for the text of the Septuagint, which he believed to be inspired, and his laxity in changing it to suit his purpose. Yet that is more of an apparent than a real inconsistency. We must never forget how different were the standards of literary veracity twenty centuries ago from those in vogue now. Just as the authors of the 'Wisdom of Solomon' or of the Sibylline works felt no compunction in attributing their productions to others, in spite of the religious fervour with which these men must have been filled, even so one felt that there was nothing wrong in mutilating or 'emending' a text. The Greek translators of the Bible, who never for a moment could have doubted the verbal inspiration of the Hebrew original, permitted themselves to alter it. Even the Targumim insert passages and change words, especially in the case of anthropomorphic expressions.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the rabbis enumerate several passages where the reading of the Hebrew original was for one reason or another changed.<sup>9</sup> Such practices cannot be compared with the Pauline

<sup>6</sup> Berakot 17 b.

<sup>7</sup> From Kennedy, *Philo's Contribution to Religion*, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Exod. 24. 10; Num. 23. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Tanhuma, Exod. 15. 7. Cf. Mekilta, *ibid.*, et Gen. R. 49.

rejection of the whole legalistic system (p. 42), nor does one readily see how Philo ever arrives at a ‘position regarding the law which approximates that of Paul’ (p. 56). There was no need for Philo being led away ‘from the region of ceremonial into that of obedience to the Divine will’, since for him they are identical.

Spiritual matters are of course subjective, and one can hardly be called to account for one’s opinions on them. Professor Kennedy is therefore certainly within his rights in considering Paul a person of ‘surer spiritual vision’ than Philo. Yet the constant reiteration of such phrases produces on the reader an effect which is not happy.

The same must be said of Mr. Bentwich’s repeated references to the Hellenistic movement as an ‘impure’ syncretism. The attempt to condemn whole philosophies and civilizations by means of short adjectives has its place, but certainly not in the calm discussions of scholars.

In spite of his manifest contempt for the Hellenistic movement, Mr. Norman Bentwich portrays well the conflict between the rival cultures in Palestine and in the Diaspora. In Palestine the Hebraic culture fought for supremacy, and won; in the Diaspora, it struggled for its very life, and in the main cannot be said to have succeeded. Mr. Bentwich finds one of the causes for this failure of Egyptian Jewry in the attempt that its leaders and exponents made to proselytize. In spiritual matters, at least, it is not true that the best defensive is a strong offensive. The attempt to gain converts for Judaism could only end by bringing into the fold large numbers who looked upon Judaism as another philosophy, but could not have for it the same deep affection that filled the souls of all who were born and bred in the faith.

On the other hand, the author does not lay sufficient stress on the inherent weakness that was introduced into the Hellenistic movement when Greek began to substitute Hebrew, first as the language of literature, and then as the sacred tongue. There is certainly that element of truth in the statement of the later

Sages that the day of the translation of the Bible into Greek was one of dire calamity. Philo may have been saved from becoming a mere Greek eclectic by his deeply religious nature, but that could hardly save the day for his followers. All who read his works were by the nature of things more deeply imbued with Hellenic than with Hebrew culture. As a result, it was only his post-mortem conversion into a Church Father that saved his works for posterity. Certainly this is a lesson that Jewish men of science to-day might do well to keep in mind.

While it is true that in Palestine during the Second Commonwealth Hebrew was not the vernacular, yet it did remain the literary and the sacred language. Moreover, Aramaic was not identified with the particular culture which Israel was called upon to combat. Nor could Greek culture hope to succeed in dominating the Holy Land after the signal victories of the Hasmoneans. It is true that Greek civilization had a subtle influence on Jewish literature even after its outward manifestation had been dealt a blow from which it could not easily recover. As Mr. Bentwich points out, the mysticism which became prevalent in some Palestinian circles was due largely to this influence. He also notes that some of the ethical teachings of the Sages may be traced to Greek sources. There is also the possibility that the systematization of the Halakah was influenced by the presence of a scientific culture. The compilation of the hermeneutic rules first by Hillel, and then by R. Ishmael, probably goes back to the influence of the Greek love of system which pervaded the atmosphere. And it is not impossible that the same facts which brought about a greater development of mysticism in Babylonia also led to the deeper development of the rules of interpretation. In the west, the nearness of Greek culture and of Christianity made all that was even remotely connected with them instinctively hated and repressed, while pagan Persia offered a fertile field both for the development of an Halakic system and of mystic imagery.

It is not quite certain, however, that the Greek language had the influence on Jewish ritual that the author thinks it had

(p. 117). That *Sanhedrin* is a Greek word is true, but that that body was originally a religious rather than a purely political one still remains to be shown. The word *Parnas* is used to-day of a President of a Jewish community, but it was not so used in Talmudic times.<sup>10</sup> Nor is its derivation from the Greek established beyond doubt. Many of the lexicographers seem to think it purely Semitic. The word *Bima* is sometimes used to describe a raised dais from which the Torah is read,<sup>11</sup> but it is never described in the Palestinian works as a definite part of the synagogue structure. Similarly, *Tik* is used of the box in which the Scroll of the Torah is held,<sup>12</sup> but the word for the Ark, as a definite part of the synagogue edifice is *Tebah*.<sup>13</sup> Onkelos translates *Zizith* by *Kraspedon*,<sup>14</sup> but that would not prove anything in view of the fact that the Peshitto and the other Targumim do not use the word. As is well known, the vocabulary of Onkelos is Babylonian Aramaic; and its use of *Kraspedon* would merely make us doubt whether the word is originally Greek.

In spite of such specks, the book is a genuine contribution to English Judaica. Its chapter on Hellenistic literature should arouse an interest in that branch of Jewish studies. In so doing, it will serve to bring back to Israel some of the works of its children who were estranged from it not for any sins of their own but because of the evils of the times. The day of reconciliation seems to have come, and it is high time that the Hellenistic writers be welcomed back to the domain of the literature of the Jewish people.

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<sup>10</sup> See Aruch Completum.

<sup>11</sup> Compare *Sotah* 7. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Shabbat* 16. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Megillah* 4. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Num. 15. 38.